

# The State of Torch

By Charles Carlson



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Charles Carlson is a graduate civil engineer, CCNY '54, a licensed professional engineer, and a former Adjunct Professor of Public Administration, SUNY, Albany.

He was an early leader in the use of computers for civil engineering design; his software was used for many highway structures in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the Midwest. Following his career in Wisconsin, Charles worked for the New York State Department of Transportation and retired as the Deputy Commissioner of Transportation for Operations. His responsibilities included design, construction, maintenance, traffic engineering and transportation planning for New York State. He was often called upon for special assignments that included disaster management and serving as a member of the New York State Commission for the 1980 Winter Olympics.

Upon retirement from the New York Department of Transportation, Charles became a Senior Vice President at the Parson Brinkerhoff civil engineering consultant firm. His first assignment there was as Deputy Manager for the design and construction of Boston's "Big Dig."

In 1995 he became managing director of Merz and McClellan, a global electrical consultancy engineering company in Newcastle, UK, which designed some of the world's largest power generation plants.

Charles and Eva, his wife of almost sixty years, live in Newtonville, NY, and Martha's Vineyard. He is currently a member of the board of directors for a number of cultural and environmental groups. He is the Immediate Past President of IATC and has held many other positions in both IATC and the Torch Club of Albany. Charles has been honored with both the Gold and Silver Torch, and is an Honorary Lifetime Member of IATC and a Lifetime Member of the Torch Foundation.

"The State of Torch" was delivered at the most recent Torch Convention, in St. Catharines, Ontario, on June 19, 2014.

If I had to pick a single word to describe "The State of Torch" at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 Torch year, it would be *transition*. From my viewpoint, everything about Torch is in a state of change and movement. We have a new website and Executive Secretary. The Torch magazine has become increasingly affordable and member friendly. Many initiatives have been introduced, with more planned for the future. I believe that all of our officers and directors would agree that we have had a good year and that the International Association of Torch Clubs (IATC) is on a roll. My term as your President ends in June, and I am pleased with our new officers and directors as well as with our new Executive Secretary, Jim Coppinger. Our board members have a spirit that will ensure a bright future for our association of Torch clubs.

#### You can expect IATC to:

Publish the tri-annual *The Torch* magazine with outstanding Torch papers as well as a family of newsletters.

Support an Annual Meeting and Convention combining Association business with social enjoyment and a stimulating program event. The 2015 Annual Meeting will be in Lincoln, Nebraska, and that of 2016 in Columbus, Ohio. The Association also supports regional mini meetings; there were three successful regional mini meetings in 2014.

Maintain an informative website – [www.torch.org](http://www.torch.org).

Award prizes, such as the Paxton Fellowship, and recognize outstanding members.

Support membership recruitment and retention and the development of new Torch clubs through cash grants and management support. During the last two Torch years, grants were used to form three new Torch clubs, to support the regional meetings, and to help the recruitment effort in several clubs.

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Manage the finances of the Association to give the highest level of service at the lowest cost.

Provide Association services to the local clubs and members by using a professional staff.

What is the State of Torch as we enter the 2014-2015 Torch Year?

#### Membership

Over the years, our membership has been sliding by about 2% per year, and

our turnover rate has been roughly 10%. Final membership numbers are not available at this time, but it appears that our membership has stabilized at 2200, with perhaps a slight increase from last year. If that increase in membership holds, it will be the first time we have had an increase in membership since Anne Sterling was IATC President. Unfortunately, the Knoxville Torch Club may disband, and the Chicago Torch club will attempt to reorganize in a more suburban setting. I am glad to report, however, that at least seventeen of our local clubs had a membership increase of over 10%, and thirty out of the sixty-seven Torch Clubs have had at least some growth. During the past two years, through the effort of incoming President-Elect Francis Moul, three new clubs in Nebraska have been added.

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The IATC grant program has been moderately successful and will be growing. An off-budget fund is now available to local clubs for membership recruitment and development. The Torch Foundation also has funding

available for membership recruitment and retention, and that has been used to print promotional literature and for new club development. These successes are encouraging, but I feel we need to keep thinking about creative and effective ways to use these funds.

Incoming President-Elect and Vice President Francis Moul has proposed an exciting new initiative for the development of new Torch Clubs. The Saginaw Valley, Michigan and Lincoln, Nebraska Torch Clubs have already donated \$3,000 to a fund for that purpose. You will be hearing from both Francis and Director at Large for Membership George Heron, seeking contributions and other kinds of support for the development of new clubs. This initiative will work closely with our partner, The Torch Foundation.

At the 2013 Annual Meeting and Convention, it was the consensus of the attending members that a household membership initiative should be introduced as a bylaw at the 2014 Annual Meeting and Convention. The bylaw amendment that will be introduced calls for a 50% reduction in the dues for a second member of a household unit. Our Finance Committee estimates a 5% reduction in revenue if this amendment is adopted, but we hope that this loss will turn into a long-term gain, as members' spouses and partners who currently attend meetings as guests will be encouraged to become members themselves.

George Heron will be leading a two-hour membership development workshop at the Annual Meeting and Convention, and the ideas developed there will be shared with all the Torch clubs. George continues to be responsible for all our membership development initiatives.

As we all realize, our membership has been ageing. The new Young Member Initiative bylaw recently passed by the membership has had

some success, but has been generally overlooked. I am sure that incoming President Haas will encourage the youth initiative.

In summary, the tools are there to help the local clubs introduce new professional people to Torch. We have a very good product.

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#### Communications

*The Torch:* The best tool that IATC has for communications is our magazine, *The Torch*. It is the only item we produce that reaches 100% of our membership. During my term of office, our communication leaders like Jim Coppinger and *Torch* editor Scott Stanfield have worked together to make the magazine increasingly member friendly. Through the miracles of

modern printing, printing costs have been reduced, color printing introduced, the font has changed, and we are using new templates. The Torch Year of 2014-2015 will see new economies. Scott and Jim are discussing the introduction of more color pages and additional features to the magazine. They also plan in the immediate future the streamlining, through e-communication, of document submission and review.

IATC continues to be dedicated to the Torch magazine as a print publication. However, reading habits are changing. Personally, most of my reading for pleasure is on my Kindle or iPod. In the future, the magazine cannot ignore that major change in our reading habits.

Through the effort of George Conklin, a member of the Durham – Chapel Hill Torch Club and a Regional Director, we now have a newly formatted digital edition of *The Torch*. Thanks to George's efforts in getting the magazine indexed on the EBSCO database, *The Torch* is now available to almost every library in the world and is scanned for online search. George is also looking at the adoptability of making our PDF archive of the magazine available. George's hard work makes our Torch articles available to researchers and enhances the value of our publication.

*Newsletters:* IATC publishes four email newsletters. Our goal is to publish about two every month. We use a service called Constant Contact and have 2135 email addresses on file. Our open rate is 40%, with about 300 bounces and the remainder "no opens." We will continue to try to increase our newsletter readership.

*Website:* IATC has been dealing with the sale of our hosting service, and we have become dissatisfied with both the new service provider and the expense. At our IATC winter retreat, we made

the decision to seek a new host and redo the website. We have arranged with Mark Dahmke, CEO of Infoanalytics of Lincoln, Nebraska, to redesign and host the website. The Board of Directors will view the Beta version on June 19. Those of us who have already viewed the Beta site are pleased.

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#### Administration

Work on the 2014-2015 budget began just after the Columbia Convention, and it soon became obvi-

ous to the Board of Directors that we could no longer afford Association Builders as our contract administrator. At the winter retreat, the Board of Directors began negotiations with Jim Coppinger to become our Executive Secretary, with his firm, Quadrant II Marketing, LLC, serving as our administrator. Jim is a long time member of Torch and a former Director. Jim has already planned a number of cost savings and will be prepared to assume this responsibility on June 30, 2014. There will be a few bumps in the road, as in any transition, but so far the process has been smooth. I wish to thank Jennifer Morrone for all her help during this transition and for being a wonderful Executive Secretary.

#### Finance

IATC is financially solvent. The Finance Committee of Haas, Carlson and Toy were initially worried by an apparent potential operating deficit of between \$8,000 and \$12,000, but managed to convert the deficit to a surplus of \$6,013. The Board of Directors:

Reduced publication cost of the Torch magazine.

Changed administrators at a significant cost savings.

Planned streamlining of services.

Reduced website expense.

In closing, I want to thank my colleagues for a successful Torch year as I look forward to my two year term as Past President. Your Board of Directors is sincerely dedicated to Torch and works diligently to do a good job. Thank you!